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PINOY LIFE IN THE MARIANAS

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Deadly Clashes

Fighting between government troops and Abu Sayyaf Muslim extremists in the southern Philippines left 10 militants dead Thursday.

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Special Friends?

Piolo Pascual and Sam Milby just laugh off nasty rumors linking them to each other. Their hearts don't beat for a special someone right now. But they make hearts flutter wherever they go.

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'Govt's rising dependence on remittances is alarming'

By DELFIN MALLARI JR.
INQUIRER

The growing dependence of the country's economy on the money sent home by overseas Filipino workers has become alarming, the head researcher of the think tank Ibon Foundation Inc. said.

Sonny Africa said the OFWs had become the government's biggest source of precious dollars, remitting $11.4 billion from January to November last year.

What is alarming, he said, is that the remittances were equivalent to 10 percent of the country's gross domestic product.

"The double digit mark makes the Philippines the most overseas remittance-dependent economy of any significant size in the world. This means that the economy continues to be kept afloat by the external and volatile OFW remittances, and not by a strong local economic capacity," he said in a statement furnished the *Philippine Daily Inquirer.*

He added that the declines in domestic investment implied a diminishing capacity to expand production and warned of a slowdown in the near future.

Africa pointed to the glaring lack of decent jobs in the country as the main factor in the exodus of Filipinos seeking employment overseas.

According to an Ibon research, an estimated 3,000 Filipinos leave the country every-

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AP

WAGE HIKE SUPPORTER
A protester is in deep thought as he joins a rally in front of the Department of Labor Thursday, Jan. 18, 2007 in Manila for a wage increase. The protesters condemned Secretary of Labor Arturo Brion's statement that he will suggest to President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo to veto the legislated wage increase of US$2.55.

CNMI wants exemption from maids' wage hike

CNMI Senate officials met Wednesday with the Philippine Consulate General to express concerns over the recent increase in wages imposed by the Philippine government on employers of newly hired domestic help from that country.

The group asked that the CNMI be exempted from this wage increase, given the state of the local economy, and assured that a mechanism is in place to ensure that workers are protected from abuse.

It was further agreed that the Memorandum of Understanding between the Philippine and CNMI governments regarding labor policies should be revisited in light of the new Philippine Overseas Employment Administration regulations.

Senate Vice President Pete P. Reyes, who is also chairman of the Senate Standing Committee on Federal Relations and Independent Agencies, led the delegation that included senators Paterno Hocog and Luis Crisos-

CNMI Page 2

RP insists on $400 as minimum pay

By JEROME ANING
INQUIRER

MANILA—The Philippine government stood firm on its new policy of setting the maids' minimum pay at US$400, with Labor Secretary Arturo Brion saying Wednesday it is for the overseas Filipino domestics' own good.

Brion linked the doubling of domestics' US$200 basic wage to "reducing, if not eliminating, abuses on vulnerable Filipino women working as maids overseas." The new policy is part of the government's thrust toward better standards, welfare and protection for working Filipino women abroad, he added.

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PINOYNEWS

POLO opens five free courses

By MARCONI CALINDAS
REPORTER

The Philippine Overseas Labor Office at the Philippine Consulate General is now accepting applicants for at least five of its free Skills Enhancement Training for overseas Filipino workers in the CNMI.

POLO will be starting with two basic courses: Culinary Arts and Basic English Language.

The Culinary Arts training course will start on Feb. 3 and will run until March 3, every Saturday from 2pm to 6pm. The Basic English Language will be from Feb. 4 to April 8. The course is going to be held every Sunday from 8pm to 11am.

For the third time, Hermie Coronejo, a culinary arts expert from the Fiesta Resort & Spa Saipan, would be lending his expertise to share some culinary tips and information to students.

Labor attache Joan Lourdes Lavilla said her office is grateful for the benevolence of Fiesta Resort officers Maggie Sablan and David Spitzer for allowing their staff to impart culinary tips and information to OFWs.

The Basic English Language course will be handled by long-time partner of POLO, the University of the Philippines Alumni Association. UPAA member Fe Calixterio will spearhead the Basic English Language class.

Other courses that POLO will be opening for registration are: Basic Nihongo, Basic Sewing and Basic Computer Operations.

The classes are on a first-come first-serve basis, said Lavilla. Only 30 OFWs per course will be allowed to join the free training.

The classes will be held at the POLO-Filipino Workers Resource Center at the Marianas Business Plaza, formerly known as the Nauru Building.

The training is in collaboration with the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration.

For more information on these courses, contact OWWA welfare officer Leonor Mabagal or administrative staff Eric Medio at 235-6992.

El Shaddai Concert tonight

By MARCONI CALINDAS
REPORTER

Dubbed as "Experience the New Year 2007, A Cheer to New Life," the El Shaddai International Catholic Charismatic Community Saipan and Tinian Chapter will hold a one-night concert today, Jan. 20, at the Pedro L. Tenorio Multi-Purpose Center.

The shows will start at 6pm and tickets are sold at $5, $10, and $20 each.

Concert designer Danny Bigalbal and Arturo Macaspac said the concert marks the first time El Shaddai will be holding such an event after 13 years of existence in the Commonwealth. Both said the show was inspired by Rev. Fr. Bong Lopez, who suggested and spearheaded the event.

Manny Fuentes will be directing the show.

Bigalbal said the concert is a fundraising activity, with a portion of the proceeds going to the repair and maintenance of the group's office in Chalan Kanoa. Some of the proceeds would also go to the acquisition of new musical instruments for the group.

A portion would also go to the Karidat on Saipan and ABS-CBN Bantay Bata program in the Philippines.

A total of 50 El Shaddai members will be performing in the concert. Bigalbal said even Fr. Bong would provide a musical number during the show.

He said the concert would consist mostly of gospel music and dance. Children of members would also be showcasing their talents.

There will also be raffle draws during the concert where ticket-holders can win a roundtrip plane ticket to Manila, Philippines, and some consolation prizes. More than 1,200 tickets have already been distributed for sales, said Macaspac, but tickets could also be purchased at the door.

To date, the group has over 500 members since its inception in 1993. The group was founded on the island by Ning Gonzales.

Philippine Marines press operations vs Abu Sayyaf

MANILA, Philippines (AP)—The Philippine military will deploy more marines to a southern island province to intensify a U.S.-backed operation against the al-Qaida-linked Abu Sayyaf group, which lost a top leader in a recent clash, military officials said Friday.

A marine brigade, or about 1,500 men, will be moved from Marawi city on the main southern island of Mindanao to the island province of Basilan next week, said Vice Admiral Rogelio Calunsag, commander of the Philippine navy, which has operational control over the marines.

Calunsag said it will "boost the support system" and consolidate the marine forces in the southwestern Philippine island provinces where the Abu Sayyaf operates—Basilan, Jolo and Tawi-Tawi.

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FROM PAGE 1

tomo, Senate legal counsel Mike Ernest and Eric Lister.

They met with Philippine Consul General Wilfredo DL. Maximo, consul Belinda Ante, and labor attaché Joan Lourdes Lavilla.

Encroachment

While emphasizing the cooperative relationship between the Philippine and CNMI governments, Reyes said that he was concerned the new "rates may encroach on CNMI jurisdiction," and shared the sentiment of other lawmakers that the CNMI would prefer to handle such matters internally.

On Dec. 16, 2006, the POEA implemented the new policy, setting minimum monthly wages for domestic help at $400. Current CNMI law places the minimum wage at $300 per month.

The new rule applies across the board to all countries hiring newly recruited domestic help from the Philippines. However, employers of domestic helpers already in place shall be exempt from this new requirement.

Further, the new policy sets a minimum age requirement of 25 for Philippine overseas workers seeking employment as domestic helpers.

Philippine Consul General Maximo said this additional measure was put in place to protect contract workers from possible abuse.

However, given the current state of the economy, Reyes requested that Maximo ask the POEA to consider an exemption for the CNMI to the new rates.

POEA dialogue

Maximo assured the senator that there was "no attempt to wrest control over CNMI" policies and noted that the new rates were simply put in place to align it with present rates paid to Filipino domestic workers in other countries.

Reyes highlighted the CNMI's judicial system and the procedures in place to hear labor complaints saying, "Unlike some other countries where Philippine overseas workers may be deployed, the CNMI has a mechanism in place for aggrieved employees to bring their case before a competent court under U.S. jurisdiction. Our government provides protection to everyone residing within our borders, and CNMI laws do not discriminate against guest workers. I would ask that the POEA take this into account when considering our position."

Consul Ante acknowledged that, while the POEA was cognizant of the fact that some nations and employers may turn to other labor markets for domestic help, the intent of the new policy is to provide employers with skilled and knowledgeable workers. She reiterated that this new policy would only apply to new deployments.

For her part, labor attaché Lavilla promised Reyes that she would air the concerns of the CNMI government with POEA officials in Manila, and ask that the CNMI may be granted an exception to the new rates given the state of the local economy and the close ties between the two governments.

The friendly and diplomatic exchange ended with both parties expressing their mutual respect for the other, Reyes stressing the strong bonds between the two governments, and the shared cultural values connecting the people of the Philippines and the CNMI. ***(JV)***

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Brion was reacting to recent mass protests in Manila and other places by overseas domestic work applicants as well recruiters angered by the pay hike and other new restrictions imposed by the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration on the deployment of Filipino domestic helpers.

"We are determined (to) stick with this policy; the industry has put forward no good reason why we should change our policy;" he said in a press conference.

Brion stressed that abuses are often committed on overseas Filipino workers in the lower-end jobs, such as domestics. The hike and tighter government supervision would ensure applicants will have better working conditions abroad, he said.

"Let's give the US$200 wage market to other countries, let their nationals be the ones who'll be abused," he said.

Brion said that if employers in places such as Hong Kong and Taiwan can give their Filipino maids $400 and above, then the more affluent ones in Singapore and the oil-rich Middle Eastern states should also be able to do so.

"The new minimum salary of $400 we have imposed for domestics will not weaken global OFW deployment, but even set a favorable standard based on the global preference for our OFWs," he said.

Brion claimed in earlier interviews that the "rich" recruiters who organized the rallies were only agitating the maids to protect their profits.

Aside from the US$400 new wage, POEA also barred recruitment agencies from collecting placement fees for domestics they send abroad. The minimum age requirement for helpers was also raised from 21 to 25 and all applicants are required to undergo training and assessment by the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority.

"We're not taking advantage of anybody," the Secretary said.

Members of the Federated Association Manpower Exporters (FAME) met on Wednesday with officials of DoLE, POEA and Tesda and they agreed to exempt from the new rules those who already had completed or were already negotiating contracts when the new rules came into effect last December 16.

POEA chief Rosalinda Dimapilis-Baldoz said the 200,000 job orders that FAME claimed the Philippines would lose were merely projections and not actual job opportunities.

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day to find jobs abroad.

"The sheer scarcity of jobs is already a sign that all is not well and that the economy lacks an internal dynamism that is able to productively harness and employ the Filipino workforce," Africa said.

Ibon is an independent development institution established in 1978 and provides research, education, publications, information work and advocacy support on socioeconomic issues.

Lifting of Guam ban opens doors for OFWs

By MARCONI CALINDAS
REPORTER

The Philippine Overseas Labor Office expressed delight over the news that the ban preventing skilled foreign workers from working in military projects in Guam has been lifted.

With this development, nonresident construction workers, especially from the Philippines, now have a good chance of getting employed in Guam for military projects.

In an earlier interview on Saipan, Guam Gov. Felix Camacho said the federal regulation that prevented H2-B skilled foreign workers has been lifted since late last year.

Labor attaché Joan Lourdes Lavilla said she is pleased with this turnout of events.

"This development opens doors of opportunities to all OFWs," she said.

For those who are interested to work in Guam, visit website address www.poea.gov.ph and look for the private agencies that are responsible for deploying prospective workers in Guam, Lavilla said.

Guam's priority is to hire from the local pool or its local residents. However, Camacho said the Guam government is also looking at workers from neighboring islands in Micronesia in anticipation of massive construction demands.

Lavilla clarified that private agencies in the Philippines and employers from Guam are solely responsible for the hiring of manpower for the U.S. territory's workforce requirements. She said all POLO would do is to help follow up on Guam's requirements.

She said that POLO learned about the lifting of the ban on nonresidents workers only late last year.

Lavilla together with the Philippines Overseas Employment Agency, conducted a "marketing mission" to Guam in September 2006. She and POEA administrator Rosalinda Baldoz flew to Guam that month for a series of meetings with the Guam Executive Branch and several other government and non-government agencies.

The visit was prompted by the expected transfer of some 8,000 U.S. Marines and 10,000 of their dependents from Okinawa, Japan to the island territory in the next three years.

Lavilla confirmed that there are indeed 15,000 to 20,000 jobs awaiting prospective nonresidents from around the Pacific, including the Philippines, but neighboring islands and countries such as Indonesia and Thailand are also eyeing these jobs. She said other countries have also visited and shown interest in getting a slice of the jobs cake in Guam.

Lavilla and Baldoz met with Sen. Jesse Lujan and Gov. Camacho during their visit. The Philippine dignitaries also met with the Guam Department of Labor, Guam Contractors Association and the Guam Chamber of Commerce.

Lavilla said that Guam is also keen to employ Filipino workers from the CNMI. She said the Guam government told them that it understands the current plight of the economy in the Commonwealth, so to alleviate the difficult situation of the workers here, Guam will probably open its doors to Saipan nonresident workers.

Based on U.S. Department of Labor data, a nonresident worker working as carpenter in Guam earns at least $12.47 per hour while a brick mason earns $12.82 per hour. Construction laborer is paid $8.39 per hour; electrician, $13.26; and office clerk, $8.07 per hour.

The military relocation to Guam is allotted $10 billion, which is to be shared by the U.S. and Japan governments.

Aside from this, the U.S. Department of Defense also set aside $5 billion infrastructure budget for Guam in the next decade.

Large-scale construction in Guam is expected to begin in 2008.

Peso seen at 50 to $1

After hitting six-year highs, the peso is expected to correct and drop to 50 to the dollar with the approach of the midterm elections in May, says UBS Investment Research.

The uncertain economic environment during election seasons will create some slight changes in the macroeconomic fundamentals, UBS said in its latest paper on the Philippine economy, noting that government spending normally rises and creates some adverse effects on the government's financial position.

Interest rates may rise from the present extremely low levels but will again fall after the elections, UBS said. "In the weeks ahead, the local yield curve will likely shift upwards and flatten after the election," it said.

It said the exchange rate correction and the increased government spending would cause no instability. ***(Inquirer)***

LABOR FRONT

Subcontract employment

By FERDIE P. DE LA TORRE
REPORTER

Q: Can a restaurant hire a waiter through subcontract agreement with another employer without the Labor director's approval?

A: No. Labor administrative hearing officer Barry Hirshbein, in a recent administrative order, ruled that employing subcontract employees without the Labor director's approval is a violation of a provision in the Nonresident Workers Act.

The provision states that "a nonresident worker shall not be permitted to perform any services or labor within the Commonwealth for any employer other than the employer for whom the Labor Chief has approved an employment contract with such worker. Nor may a nonresident worker perform any services or labor on a subcontract between the employer of record and any other employer, except that the Chief may approve such a subcontract between the employer for a particular job with a specified duration as part of the original employment contract."

■ ■ ■

Q: What violations are committed by an employer who, despite the Labor director's request, fails to provide the hours worked by an alien worker?

A: Hirshbein, in same recent order, pointed out that a respondent who fails to provide records relating to an employee's hours worked as requested by the Labor director is a violation of a provision of the Nonresident Workers Act.

The provision states that any employer of any nonresident worker shall keep and present immediately upon demand of the Labor Chief or his authorized representative, and at such regular intervals as the Chief may by regulation require, information such as payrolls showing the number of hours worked each week, gross compensation, any education, and net payments made to each worker.

The hearing officer also cited that provisions of the wage and hour laws impose the same obligation and make it a criminal offense for failure to comply.

■ ■ ■

Q: A restaurant has ceased operations. An alien employee, however, still has a valid entry permit when the restaurant shut down its business operation. Can this worker enter a new one-year employment contract with a new employer?

A: Yes. Pursuant to Alien Labor Rules And Regulations, the Hearing Officer "may waive any rule upon a determination that no party will be prejudiced and that the ends of justice will be served thereby." In a previous order, the Labor's administrative hearing officer authorized a worker in a similar situation to seek a transfer employer in 45 days.

Submit questions on labor issues to *Saipan Tribune* via e-mail at editor@saipantribune.com, or by calling 235-6397, 235-2440, or 235-8747 and leaving a message at Ext. 133 or 135. You may also submit questions in person by writing it down and dropping it off at the *Saipan Tribune*'s office on the second floor of the CIC Centre on Beach Road, Garapan.

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10 Abu Sayyaf killed after leader's death

By TERESA CEROJANO
AP WRITER

MANILA, Philippines (AP)—Fighting between government troops and Abu Sayyaf Muslim extremists in the southern Philippines left 10 militants dead Thursday, following the killing of a senior leader of the group, officials said.

The new violence flared as President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, encouraged by the killing of senior Abu Sayyaf leader Abu Sulaiman, vowed to finish off the Islamic militants "with a hand of steel" and U.S. assistance.

Sulaiman, 41, whose real name is Jainal Antel Sali Jr., left a legacy of lethal attacks and kidnappings, putting him on U.S. and Philippine most-wanted lists. The U.S. had offered up to US$5 million (€3.9 million) for his capture or killing.

After years of tracking Sulaiman, U.S.-backed Philippine troops cornered him and other rebel leaders Tuesday in a Jolo island jungle hideout about 950 kilometers (590 miles) south of Manila. He died in the ensuing gunbattle, military officials said.

A Philippine Marines platoon battled about 30 extremists under Abu Sayyaf veteran Radullan Sahiron in Jolo's Patikul town around noon Thursday, said Marine spokesman Lt. Col. Ariel Caculitan.

AP

Regional Philippine Army Commander Lt. Gen. Eugenio Cedo, center, inspects assorted ammunitions and electronic materials used by the al-Qaeda linked Abu Sayyaf Group in the manufacturing of home-made bombs Wednesday, January 17, 2007, in Jolo island in southern Philippines.

Ten Abu Sayyaf members and three government troops died in the hour-long fight, while three militants were captured.

He said officials have yet to identify those killed or captured, or ascertain if Sahiron was among them.

The U.S. has offered a US$200,000 (€154,930) bounty for Sahiron's capture or killing. "We are resolved to work with our strategic allies in the region, and with the United States, to tighten the dragnet and stop the movement of terrorists, their finances and their deadly material across the seas and borders," Arroyo said at a meeting with U.S. Ambassador Kristie Kenney and military and defense officials.

She said the "relentless pressure" on the militants "is taking its toll, and we will keep it up until all the terrorists and their clandestine cells are accounted for."

"This government is determined to finish the job with a hand of steel against evil," Arroyo said. U.S. troops and military advisers in the southern Philippines have provided training and intelligence for the four-month-long offensive.

Kenney congratulated the military for Sulaiman's killing.

"They are a tremendous fighting force and they are doing extraordinary things in capturing some of the world's most deadly terrorists," she said.

Sulaiman had claimed responsibility for a 2004 bombing aboard a Philippine ferry. The blast and resulting fire killed 116 people in Southeast Asia's second-worst terror attack.

Key bombing suspect arrested

MANILA, Philippines (AP)—The alleged leader of a group involved in a series of bombings that left eight people dead and dozens wounded last year has been arrested, and two other suspected bombers were killed in separate operations in the southern Philippines, officials said Wednesday.

Kule Mamagong, who is facing multiple murder charges, was arrested Saturday in Cotabato province, said Chief Superintendent Joel Goltiao. Mamagong was a local member of the al-Qaida-linked Indonesia-based terror network Jemaah Islamiyah, which has been blamed for the October 2002 bombings in Bali, Indonesia, that killed 202 people, Goltiao said.

In a separate operation Tuesday, police and soldiers in a town in nearby Sultan Kudarat province killed two men allegedly involved in a bombing to extort money from businessmen, army spokesman Maj. Ernesto Torres said.

The two men were to pick up money from local businessmen, but fled after sensing the presence of police and soldiers who had been deployed as part of a sting operation, Torres said.

They fled on a motorcycle and were killed by pursuing soldiers and officers, he said.

The pair allegedly were involved in a bombing at a mall in Tacurong town on Dec. 28, wounding four.

In charges filed in court in December, prosecutor Al Calica said Mamagong allegedly plotted the bombing outside the municipal hall in Makilala, Cotabato province, on Oct. 10, killing eight people and injuring 28 others. Mamagong also was blamed for another bombing earlier the same day in a market in nearby Tacurong town that injured four people.

Mamagong also was identified as a commander of the separatist Moro Islamic Liberation Front, the main Muslim rebel group, which has signed a cease-fire agreement and currently involved in peace negotiations with the government.

Chief rebel negotiator Mohagher Iqbal denied knowing Mamagong, adding that the bombings were outside MILF areas.

CA orders Smith, gov't to explain transfer of custody

By TETCH TORRES
INQUIRER.NET

The Court of Appeals has ordered the solicitor general and US Marine Daniel Smith to comment on the petition filed by the victim in the Subic rape case questioning the propriety of the government's allowing the convict's return to American custody.

The single-page resolution penned by Associate Justice Ricardo R. Rosario of the court's sixteenth division gave Smith's lawyers and Solicitor General Antonio Eduardo Nachura 10 days to file their respective comments on a motion filed by Evalyn Ursua, counsel of rape victim "Nicole," contending that the convict's transfer from the Makati City Jail to the US embassy was illegal.

Ursua also requested that a warrant of arrest be issued against Smith so the Philippine government can regain custody of the convicted rapist.

Nicole's motion assailed the controversial decision of the executive branch, through the Interior and Local Government, Foreign Affairs and Justice departments, to have Smith transferred to the US embassy late in the evening of December 29.

Ursua said Smith should be considered a fugitive from justice and thus, "deemed to have withdrawn his appeal" of his conviction and 40-year sentence for rapof his conviction and 40-year sentence for raping Nicole inside the Subic Bay Freeport in late November 2005.

She said that under rules of court, the Court of Appeals can dismiss an appeal if the appellant escapes from prison, jumps bail or flees the country while the appeal is pending.

PHILIPPINE BRIEFS

RP-developed game nominated to int'l tilt

Filipino mobile game developer Anino Mobile (subsidiary of Anino Entertainment) was recently became one of the 25 finalists in an international contest on developing video games for the mobile platform. Anino Mobile's "Anima Wars," became an entry in the International Mobile Gaming Awards (IMGA) and was entered in four of a total of six categories; Most Innovative Game, Excellence in 3D, Best Interactive Experience and Best Use of Connectivity. The two other categories are Best Use of Flash and the Grand Prix for the top winner. Anino Entertainment Founder Niel Dagondon said in an interview that it was their first time to join an international mobile competition and was lucky enough to be among the 25 finalists. There are about 400 entries from different mobile game developers in the contest. The finalists will submit playable versions of their games to IMGA judges by January 26. The six winners will be selected on Feb. 11 during the 3GSM Conference in Barcelona, Spain and the official winners will be declared on Feb. 14. The winners are poised to go home with 5,000 US dollars in each category and $15,000 for the IMGA Grand Prix winner. (Inquirer)

US CIA director praises RP

WASHINGTON (AP)—The director of the CIA praised the Philippines on Thursday for its fight against terrorists, saying the country's government and military have worked closely with the United States to decrease the threat from extremists. CIA Director Michael Hayden told lawmakers that U.S.-Philippine cooperation has "contributed greatly to strengthening the capacity of the Philippine armed forces and the Philippine security services." "In terms of what intelligence and military power can do, it's done it in this part of the global war" against terror, Hayden said at a House of Representatives Intelligence Committee hearing. On Wednesday, the Philippine military announced the death of Abu Sulaiman, a senior leader of the Abu Sayyaf extremist group. He had been was wanted for plotting the kidnapping of American and Filipino tourists from a resort on the southeastern island of Palawan in 2001. One of the Americans, Guillermo Sobero, was beheaded. Rep. Todd Tiahrt said the United States has "trained the Philippine military, and we've given them tools necessary to make that country safer. And this is a success story."

Priest charged in embezzlement scheme

LOUISA, Virginia (AP)—A Roman Catholic priest from the Philippines, also suspected of having a wife and children in violation of church rules, appeared in court on a charge of embezzling hundreds of thousands of dollars from two rural parishes.

The Rev. Rodney L. Rodis, 50, did not enter a plea during the appearance Thursday.

The Roman Catholic Diocese of Richmond has said Rodis embezzled more than $600,000 (€464,300) from his two parishes, but a state police investigator said the money could top $1 million (€770,000).

Rodis was indicted Jan. 8 on one count of felony embezzlement.

Authorities allege Rodis opened an account in a church's name, deposited donations in the account and then diverted them for personal use. Court records show that bank records seized from Rodis' home include a receipt for a service for wiring money to the Philippines.

Rodis is suspected of having a wife and children in violation of church rules because he and a woman are listed as husband and wife on a deed of trust for a mortgage. He has said they are not married, but neighbors say he referred to her as his wife.

Piolo and Sam laugh off twosome rumors

By DOLLY ANNE CARVAJAL
INQUIRER

Piolo Pascual and Sam Milby just laugh off nasty rumors linking them to each other.

The woman now closest to Piolo's heart is his mom. "Last Valentine's Day, I hired a chef to cook dinner for me and my Mom at a rooftop." And Rica Peralejo? "I've stopped pursuing her. We both realized we're better off as friends."

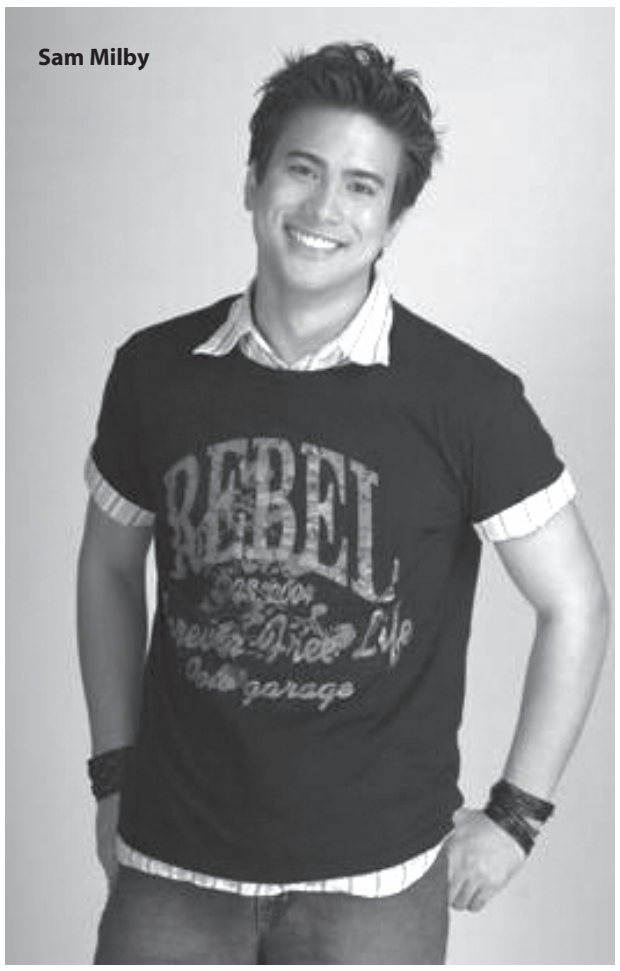
So all work and no love? "I know in time when God sends the one I can spend the rest of my life with, I will choose love over career."

Sam just moved to his new house but the irony is, he's hardly home. "I don't have time for myself or for love. But of course, I dream of coming home to someone someday."

How delightfully strange it is that their hearts don't beat for a special someone right now. But they make hearts flutter wherever they go.

Maybe it's just their calling to be "Papable" material. You're possessed by their charms but you can never possess them.

A.S.A.P. Live presents "Heartthrobs" on Feb. 2 and 3 at the Music Museum, featuring these two most sought-after "Papas."


Sam Milby

From a distance

KC Concepcion flew back to Paris last Sunday. She and Lino Cayetano were together during her last few days here. Would their budding romance stand the test of time and distance? Is it going to be loin des yeux, loin du coeur (out of sight, out of mind)?

Or is it more like when she is out of sight, he will be out of his mind? Is Lino going to do a Tom Cruise and propose to KC in La Tour Eiffel?

Ooh la la! C'est l'amour!

'Flor' recall

John Estrada is looking forward to playing the role of Colonel Gary Alvarado in ABS-CBN's "Maria Flordeluna." Based on the hit '70s radio series, "Flordeluna" used to star John's ex-wife Janice de Belen in the '80s TV version.

He recalls, "I grew up watching "Flordeluna" because back in Basilan, 9 was the only channel we had. I never thought I'd end up marrying Flor, este, Janice."

Marriage over. So is his relationship with Vanessa del Bianco. "It will be a sad Valentine for me but I have my kids and barkada to keep me company."

He swears there's nothing going on between him and Mylene Dizon. "I want to enjoy being single for a while. But I'm not on the prowl." Looking around but not searching, huh, John? Just like other singles out there, John has learned that loneliness eventually feels like something called freedom.

Guess who

The organizer of a corporate event got so irked with this actor/TV host who mispronounced most of the terms and names in his spiel. During the rehearsal, he did okay. But when it was already show time, he bungled his lines.

The big boss minced no words and told his staff, "Next time, don't get an addict to host our program!" Mr. Actor/host really seemed so spaced-out. He'd better shape up lest there be no more space for him in the limelight.

Kiss flicks

This week, the StarStruck Survivors tackle their first acting test as they star in their very own kiss flicks, directed by Rico Gutierrez, with an acting workshop from multi-awarded actress Gina Alajar.

Today, Dex Quindoza of Manila and Rich Asuncion of Bohol get to kiss each other in the action flick "Takas" while Friday's "Bestpren" is a fantasy flick starring Prince Stefan of Iloilo and Stef Prescott of La Union. The musical "Dude," airs on Saturday with Aljur Abrenica of Pampanga and Kris Bernal of Quezon City.

Who will kiss stardom goodbye as the search gets more torrid?

Bad vibes

A network insider told me Mariel Rodriguez is no longer too happy with her stint in "Wowowee" and that she might quit the show soon. Is she contemplating resignation for the same reasons that Iya Villania and Kat Alano did?

Lately, viewers are noticing that she seems disoriented while co-hosting the noontime

Piolo Pascual

show. I texted Mariel about it. Her reply: "Wowowee is my only show now, so why should I leave?"In spite of the good ratings, is ther

In spite of the good ratings, is there really bad vibes permeating within "Wowowee" that's nothing to be wowed about?

First Christmas

LJ Reyes was bubbling with joy when she told me about her first Christmas with BF Alfred Vargas. "We enjoyed being free just to be ourselves in the States. It was our first trip abroad together. We were like kids strolling around Disneyland. I gave him a pair of rubber shoes. He gave me a bag and a cute caricature of us."

At the (heart) rate they're going, a "miniature" LJ and Alfred will surely be in the picture someday soon.

Secret lovers

Mark Herras and Katrina Halili already sound like a broken record with their denials about romance brewing between them. But what's this I heard that they're sweet when nobody's looking? Maybe it's the thrill of being secret lovers that keeps them coming back for more.

Playing house

PBB housemate winner Nene Tamayo is now enjoying playing house with hubby Anthony Plamio. "I have no regrets about marrying at 25. I want to have a baby this year. Hopefully a boy, then a girl." But for now her "babies" are a morning show with Jay Sonza on NUTV and the soap "Amor Chico" in Cebu.

Luck of the draw

By NESTOR TORRE
PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

It's both a wonder and a puzzle, but ever since it began telecasting months ago, Channel 2's weeknight game show, "Deal or No Deal," has yet to award its full P2 million prize to any of its scores upon scores of players thus far (at least as of this writing).

A couple have won around P1 million each, but that's about it. Worse, some celebrity players have even gone home with P1 (apiece) for their pains!

What is it about the game show that makes it so difficult for its players to win big? It's based on sheer luck, with a player's fate being sealed by the choice he makes of a particular briefcase to place his hopes on at the start of the game.

So, if he chooses a briefcase containing a small amount, nothing he does during the game can substantially affect its outcome for him.

It's for this reason that, although we watch the program from time to time, we haven't given it the involvement we invest in other, more skills-oriented game shows on the tube. Players can scream and shake but their fate is sealed.

Another major factor that reduces players' winnings is the "greed" motive that pushes contestants to reject already substantial deals from the show's resident "banker," because they want to make even more money by pushing the game into the next round. Alas, that's usually when the really big amount themselves, thus drastically reducing the "greedy" players' final take-home loot.

This is what happened last Dec. 25, when Boy Abunda tried to win a bundle for the people in his hometown in Samar. The banker had already offered him hundreds of thousands of pesos, but Boy wanted more, so he took the game to yet another round and ended up with only P10,000 for his pains.

This was a crushing blow, but it wasn't as dire as what happened to Roderick Paulate and Efren "Bata" Reyes, who went home with only a paltry peso each, boo-hoo.

So, the rule for future players should be: If the pot hits P100,000 or P200,000, resist all "greedy" impulses and accept the banker's and Kris Aquino's deal—or suffer the consequences.

Million pot

Only a few days after we had written the piece above, "Deal or No Deal" finally got its first P2 million winner—fully six months after the game show had started telecasting on a weeknight basis.

DEAL OR NO DEAL
MAIN | THE BANKER'S BLOG | HOWIE MANDEL | THE MODELS | PLAY & WIN | GAME | PHOTOS | ABOUT
Choose one of the suitcases
This will be your suitcase

The winner was a supremely confident young man who didn't make a false move throughout the long game. Luck was clearly with him as he first opened the suitcases with the low amounts, thus jacking the show's resident banker's offers up to the hundreds of thousands, then to the millions.

Even more happily, subsequent contestants were the first to benefit from the game show's beefed-up top prize—from the P2 million, to P4 million!

As the game is now played with the bigger top prize up for grabs, we serve a new excitement in everyone involved—the contestants, the studio audience. Even the host Kris Aquino.

It was a really astute move to double the game's pot, because it set the show apart from other game programs, many of which offer a couple of million bucks in potential top winnings. With its new P4 million pot, "Deal" is now the best game show to beat.

But, luck remains the game's most crucial factor. If you're lucky and have ice water running in your veins, you can win big. However, if you're unlucky, not all the bravado in the world can turn the negative tide.

The following night, it was Sen. Bong Revilla's turn to "deal," and he won "only" P300,000. The night after that, the female contestant was a looker and was really determined to win, but she went home with a peso less than P10,000.Well that's the luck of t

Well that's the luck of the draw!

What cameras didn't catch at Golden Globes

By RUBEN V. NEPALES
PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

BEVERLY HILLS, California—Here are some scenes that the cameras at the 64th Golden Globe Awards at the International Ballroom of the Beverly Hilton Hotel failed to catch:

■ Cameron Diaz went to her reported ex-boyfriend, Justin Timberlake, not once but twice during the show's commercial breaks. The actress, lovely in a white gown and red, red lipstick, knelt before the seated Justin. No, she did not seem to be pleading for a reconciliation but she appeared to just want to talk to her supposed ex. It was good to see that they were on speaking terms.

■ Angelina was the most beautiful bystander on the red carpet. As her husband, Golden Globe Best Supporting Actor Brad Pitt, was being interviewed by Mary Hart up in the platform of "Entertainment Tonight (ET)," she stood by down on the red carpet. Angelina's off-shoulder gown tantalizingly displayed her tattoos. She gamely posed for our cameras.

■ By not going up "ET's" platform, she saved herself—and Brad—from ignominy by being invited to ride on a rotating mini-stage. The revolving stage was meant to show off a star's outfit in all degrees but those who gamely stepped up on that stage looked like embarrassed dolls in a music box or fashionable offerings on a Lazy Susan.

■ With so many top stars to choose from, the folks behind the platforms lining up the red carpet, from "ET," "E!" to "Access Hollywood," sometimes had to turn down big names. I heard several big names being turned down, with spiels that went like this, "(Name of star), I love you but…"

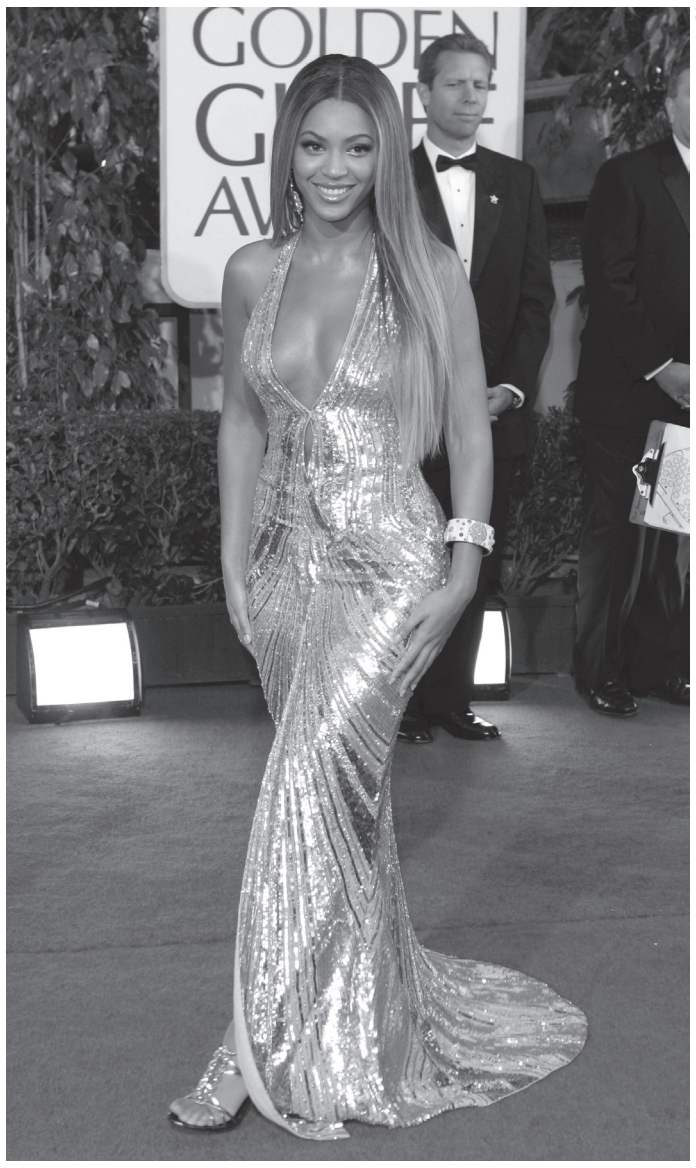
■ Our additional volunteer job of making sure these platform shows stayed within our four-minute max rule of their interviews with stars (to keep the star traffic flowing) came with a risk—the glare of an actress if we accidentally stepped on her flowing gown.

■ Sharon Stone's date was writer and frequent Vanity Fair contributor, Dominick Dunne.

■ Abigail Breslin was as cute as a, well, "Little Miss Sunshine," on the red carpet.

■ Sheryl Crow, with her bare arms and long blonde tresses, could—surprise, surprise—outpose them all. She was a pro before all the photographers screaming her name.

■ Access Hollywood had a bartender who was costumed to look like Borat, bad wig and all. A couple of these platforms were mixing drinks and making espresso right on the red carpet.


AP

Beyonce arrives for the 64th Annual Golden Globe Awards on Monday, Jan. 15, 2007, in Beverly Hills, Calif.

■ Beyonce was a blinding presence in her figure-hugging, sparkly gold gown.

■ We unexpectedly confirmed the talk that this couple, who host this entertainment show, are not actually that friendly off-camera. We saw how the male host simmered when his female colleague grabbed an interview with a star.

■ Peter Gyllenhaal also stood by as his wife, Best Actress nominee Maggie Gyllenhaal, struck poses for the clamoring photographers. We teased him that there was a time when we interviewed him almost every month. "I have three movies coming up this year so I'll be seeing you," he said. Then he joined Maggie, who gave birth to their baby girl, for loving poses before the fotogs.

■ Some stars are just like you and me. At the start of the red carpet line, they looked nervous or scared. They depended on their publicists to guide them through the bewildering mass of media lining up the path to the hotel lobby. Many were naturally poised, ready to face the cameras but for several, it must be the longest walk of their lives.

■ One of the most elegant, simply because she was low-key and looked really classy, was Sophie Okonedo, Best Actress in a Mini-Series or TV Movie for her turn in "Tsunami, the Aftermath."

■ Reese Witherspoon was in a hot yellow dress onstage—what better way to say, "I'm free!"

■ At the Warner Bros/InStyle party, which had the most tempting Godiva chocolate offerings, actor Terrence Howard asked a lady minding the sweets bar, "Which one has nuts?"

■ With a live band, this was the party to be again. It's what we expect from those trendsetters at InStyle.

■ Steven Spielberg introduced us to his daughter, Sasha. Our youngest, Ella, surprised us by speaking up and telling Spielberg, "I want to be a filmmaker." She and our other daughter, Nikki, were our extra guests this year. With Nikki going to college next year, we figured this is her chance to go. The two girls had a blast chatting briefly to Paul Dano of "Little Miss Sunshine" and Jennifer Hudson.

■ The Fox party is still going strong at the Penthouse ballroom of the Hilton as we write this. We can hear the music throbbing up on our hotel room's ceiling because we are just one floor down. To party or to write? You know which impulse won because you are reading this.

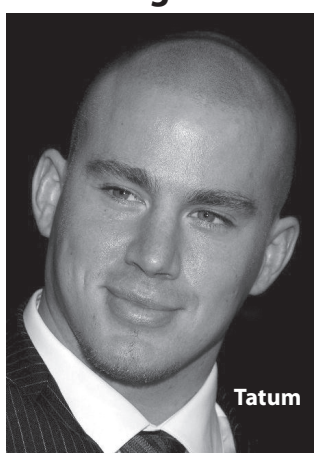
Bet they'll be big in 2007

By NIÑO MARK SABLAN
INQUIRER

Hollywood is overflowing with talented, gorgeous people. While some get lucky and become superstars overnight, many others take a longer route before achieving top-tier status.

The following celebrities made waves in 2006, and with their good looks, undeniable talent, passion and X factor, they are sure to come on even stronger this year!

Channing Tatum


Tatum

The big and bald Channing started out in the industry as a print ad model and as an extra in Ricky Martin's "She Bangs" vid, before he launched an acting career. He has appeared in a 2004 episode of "CSI: Miami," in 2005's high school drama "Coach Carter" and 2006's "She's the Man" with Amanda Bynes. Quite easy on the eyes, this hunky looker seems to be headed for a lot of macho roles, starting with the Iraqi war drama "Stop Loss" where he reportedly plays a hotshot fighter from Texas.

Chris Daughtry

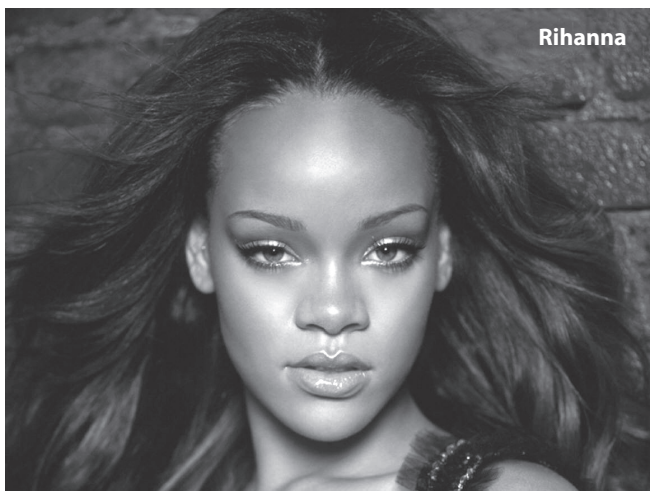
He may not have been crowned American Idol last year because of some gray-haired guy, but this certified rocker won't be deprived of fans, tours and good chart positionings. Having won nods from "Entertainment Weekly" and Rob Zombie, Chris recently came out with his album called Daughtry (also the name of his band), which debuted impressively on the charts.

Kristin Cavallari

Our scene-stealer from "Laguna Beach" eased into the entertainment industry pretty fast, appearing in a couple of movies and even getting to host her own reality show called "Get the Party started," which unfortunately got axed faster. Despite this, there seems to be no stopping Kristin. She continues to make more movies, enlarge her fan base and drive more paparazzi into a tizzy.

Rihanna

Not the prettiest face, yeah, but what an amazing voice! This sexy singer came up with a couple of hits in 2006, even winning some big awards. With the right songs and dance moves, she can very well be the next Beyoncé.


Rihanna

Jennifer Hudson

"Dreamgirls" has just showed everyone how talented this girl is. The sparkling movie is proof enough that losing in a contest isn't always the end of the world or of one's fledgling career. Hail Jennifer, the new diva!

Wentworth Miller

If he plays his cards right, Wentworth (what a name!) will be the next Keanu Reeves or Ben Affleck. With his immense success and large fan base via "Prison Break," Wentworth's next logical step should be a successful movie career, and pronto!

John Legend

This child prodigy oozes soul and sex appeal with his songs. There aren't a lot of male singers crooning out there right now, but even with competition, we're pretty sure John Legend can kick their ass. He's deep, he's catchy and he's a sight to look at.

Katherine McPhee

Weight problems and bad song choices aside ("Somewhere Over the Rainbow" and "It's All Coming Back To Me Now"), there is no denying the gorgeousness, the presence and the confidence of Katherine. She looked and acted like a real star the first time we saw her on "American Idol." Now, she is even being considered as the next Wonder Woman.

Not bad for a newcomer!

Lily Allen

Loved by everyone who hears her, Lily looks cute in an odd sort of way, with her light and feathery voice -- a unique sound first heard in her breakthrough single, "Smile." We want to hear more of Lily and we want more people to listen to her this year.

Leona Lewis

Leona is the winner of the first ever "X Factor" talent show from Simon Cowell. Armed with a fantastic voice, a beautiful face and competitive songwriting skills, this promising talent should hit it big in Great Britain and the rest of the world.

Corinne Bailey Rae

She reminds you of Erykah Badu and Macy Gray, though younger and much better-looking. She's got a long way to go, so if she doesn't reach her peak yet this 2007, we won't mind. Her debut album is treasure enough, and award-winning bodies are already taking notice.

McPhee

Kevin Zegers

Kevin, most noted for his performance in Transamerica, looks like a teen heartthrob even if he's probably way past his teen years. That troubled teen aura, coupled with his acting experience, puts him in the running as the next hot dreamboy for girls and girly guys.

Jesse Metcalfe

This hunk, who is famous for going topless in "Desperate Housewives" and for his very well-groomed eyebrows, made the right moves last year with his movie "John Tucker Must Die." There are rumors of him being gay, but that shouldn't matter. This Robert Ortega look-alike should capitalize on his hottie status now so 2007 can be a banner year for him.

Dainty Kane

The name might be the worst group moniker ever, but a listen to its first single, "Showstopper" shows that Dainty Kane can potentially exceed the life span of other "Making the Band" products. In fact, something tells us that the girls in this band might actually make it bigger if they pursued individual music careers. For now, time to enjoy the group's catchy first single!

OPINYON

PINOY KASI

Asean Plus

By MICHAEL TAN
PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

Last Wednesday, I wrote about the need for people in the region to better understand our common legacies, so we can move forward together. But Asean has remained on my mind since then, and I thought there was room for one more column to push for greater awareness of Asean.

How many Filipinos are aware, for example, of Asean efforts to tackle the HIV/AIDS pandemic, or to prepare for another more deadly outbreak of SARS, or of avian flu? What about joint efforts to control Islamist terrorism? How many avail of Asean university scholarships? Are we prepared for 2020, the target date for an Asean-wide policy of free movement of labor?

Expanding

We hear more about the European Union than Asean, and the gains made behind the scenes. We don't hear enough, either about the Filipinos working for Asean, including Rodolfo Severino Jr., one of the former secretary-generals of Asean.

Asean was set up in 1967 with five founding members: Thailand (which hosted the first meeting), Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore and the Philippines. More than anything else, the association was an anti-communist alliance, spurred largely by the United States, which had gotten embroiled in the Vietnam War, and was worried about the communist giant in the north, China. Asean's founding members themselves all had to deal with internal communist insurgencies, some of which had support from China. Asean turns 40 this year an

Asean turns 40 this year and now has 10 members. Besides the five founding members, it now includes Brunei, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam and Burma (Myanmar). No longer an anti-communist alliance, Asean is perhaps the most diverse regional bloc in the world, the majority of members being liberal democracies with free market economies but the association now includes such members as its erstwhile nemesis Vietnam, still communist with a bustling free market economy, as well as Burma which is ruled by a military dictatorship.

Not only that, there's Asean Plus 3, the three being China, Japan and South Korea. I marvel at how the three countries are able to meet, during Asean summits, to discuss their own internal agenda. In effect, Asean, a kind of younger sibling, hosts a more formidable East Asian bloc of elder (big?) brothers, including still another erstwhile enemy that used to be referred to with trepidation as "Red China" or the "yellow peril."

There's more. China, Japan and South Korea are also considered dialogue partners, together with seven others: the United States (said almost incidentally), Australia, New Zealand, Canada, India and the European Union. In effect, Asean has expanded its reach to much of the world and, who knows, maybe in the future it will include the African and Latin American blocs as dialogue partners.

Glocalization

Asean has matured, taking its place in "glocalization." That's a hybrid word that originally referred to the way individual countries (the "local") respond to globalization. For example, McDonald's gave rise to local imitations like Jollibee and Mang Donald's.We could see Asean as the hu

We could see Asean as the hub for regional glocalization. The more radical will say Asean has effectively been co-opted, transformed into a tool for capitalist globalization. I'd agree, but would argue that Asean has also created new opportunities for a glocalization process. The tensions in East Asia, for example, will have to be resolved in our part of the world, and not in Washington.

Asean Plus provides the environment for all these developments, but the extent to which individual countries benefit will still depend on each country's government and citizens.

Let me use the manufacturing sector as an example. Nationalists used to complain about how countries like the United States dump their products on developing countries, but lately what we've been seeing are "Stateside" goods stamped "Made in China" as well as the Chinese's own brand name products.

Today we're also being flooded with Asean goods, the result in part of member-countries gradually lifting import tariffs on products made by its members. Who's winning here? Asean countries that had enough foresight to develop a strong manufacturing sector that could move into the international market, starting with Southeast Asia. Check our supermarkets and our malls and you'll find, again, "Stateside" goods made in Malaysia or Indonesia, as well as homegrown products such as cheaper versions of Tupperware from Thailand, dinnerware sets and glassware from Indonesia. We're also importing an array of food products from Asean countries, from Vietnam's nangka (jackfruit) chips to Thai patis (fish sauce).

Who's losing? The countries with a weak manufacturing sector, the ones content to remain consumers and importers. Is it surprising that Filipino factories making plastics, furniture or even "patis" [fish sauce] are closing down, unable to innovate and to compete with Asean imports? I will confess to an addiction to Vietnamese nangka chips, but for the life of me, I can't understand why we can't produce our own and export them, too.

Free labor

We should also be preparing ourselves for 2020, when we move into a free movement of labor within Asean. Being mainly a labor-exporting country, we could probably cash in on that new policy, but it could work the other way around as well. I can imagine, for example, that as Filipino nurses abandon the Philippines, we might actually end up having to import nurses from, say, Vietnam.

The free-movement-of-labor policy will be preceded by regional moves to standardize training and qualifications. We're already seeing other countries racing to improve their education standards, from English and Chinese language skills to high-tech science. By 2020, Filipinos might face stiff competition in the regional labor market.

Ironically, this early, our neighbors recognize that the Philippines has some of the skills and expertise they don't have so they're still sending students over to train with us, or pirating Filipino educators to teach, for example, in Singapore.

This isn't a bad thing per se; over at the University of the Philippines (UP), for example, I have a project supported by the Rockefeller Foundation to train Southeast Asian health professionals and social scientists for research around sexuality and health issues. It brings in money to UP, but I am aware, too, that in the long run, we might see Vietnamese and Laotians overtaking us with research skills because their governments eventually take over, providing the institutional support for these scholars to conduct their own research and to train more scholars.

The people who nurtured Asean have been a pragmatic lot, modifying the organization to keep in line with changing global realities. Asean Plus has promise, but in the long run, some members will end up reaping more of these Plus benefits than others simply because they had a vision for 2020, and beyond.

Malcolm on lawyers and politicians

Looking Back
By AMBETH OCAMPO
PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

While cleaning the books on my shelves over the weekend, I almost missed a volume bound in a dull red cloth chewed on by rodents. "American Colonial Careerist," it said on the spine, and I recognized the author, George A. Malcolm, as the same man for whom a building at the University of the Philippines in Diliman, Quezon City, was named. Malcolm Hall houses the UP College of Law, of which he wrote:

"The College of Law, University of the Philippines was organized to supply quality, not quantity leaders. All to no avail, law schools mushroomed all over the Islands. The Bar examinations became great sporting events, with candidates ready to mortgage their patrimony and sell their souls if only they could get passing grades. Yet when the six long years of study passed and the Bar examination was hurdled, no clients awaited the embryo lawyers. Droves of half-baked parasites were superimposed on an already top-heavy governmental structure and a lean economy.

"Speaking with bitter irony, there is a dearth of lawyers in the Philippines. A mere 3,000 candidates take the Bar examination. Only about 100 aspire to fill a vacant legal position. To meet this appalling crisis, the 1953 Congress encroached on the judicial field to transmute flunkers -- those who had failed to pass the Bar examination conducted by the Supreme Court -- into second-class lawyers. The High Tribunal nullified the retroactive features of the legislation."

After going through this, I realized Malcolm was worth reading because he served for 50 years in the Philippines and Puerto Rico and had valuable insights particularly on personalities like Jose Rizal, Emilio Aguinaldo, Jose Pardo de Tavera, Manuel Quezon et al. to whom he devoted a whole chapter. He also completed chapters on business and the economy, but deleted them to concentrate on law and politics, the area of his competence.

Since we face elections again this year Malcolm's remarks remain relevant 50 years later:

"Party conflicts in the Philippines center not on issues but on men. The support of the masses was given to the glamorous Quezon rather than to venerable figures of the past [Aguinaldo and Gregorio Aglipay], to the glamorous [Manuel] Roxas rather than to a rival portrayed before the electorate as vacillating and weak, and to the glamorous Magsaysay rather than to an invalid opponent. In every instance, the voters expressed their preference for the younger more vigorous leader. In no instance were there any clear-cut issues between the contending parties, except that in the 1953 campaign, [Ramon] Magsaysay tried to capitalize on nasty scandals and [Elpidio] Quirino tried to divert attention to American intervention."

Some of the clowns now in elective office are not even glamorous and would probably make Malcolm cringe, but of electoral protests he wrote:

"The Filipino people have not yet learned that acceptance of the results of an election is a key to successful self-government. Not 50 percent of the election cases should have reached the courts, but all of them had to be decided. I doubt if any member of the Supreme Court of my time really enjoyed this hard and tedious work. And naturally, judges differ in their appreciation of ballots, with one solitary ballot sometimes resolving a contest."

This column is starting to look and sound like that of Justice Isagani Cruz but one cannot help but read more and weep. Malcolm wrote about sore losers who would not even congratulate the winners in election. He wrote about those who spent more than what was stipulated by law for the campaign. He wrote about those who took from public coffers or sold their patrimony to win the election. There was so much here that made me wonder how a self-destructive people such as ourselves have survived so long.

I have only read snippets, but I will definitely read Malcolm from cover to cover over the weekend. For now, I will reproduce the closing reflections in his chapter on "Politicians and Elections" that might help those considering Charter change or change in the present form of government. Just remember these words were written half a century ago:

"...I believe it has been established that the Republic of the Philippines needs a genuine two-party system. One-party government under the Commonwealth had approached close to legalized dictatorship. A tripartite alignment under the Republic had constituted an invitation to intrigue and frustration. To keep the nation from falling apart, minority leaders should not abase principle to hop on the bandwagon of the party in power to secure some transitory advantage—a disgusting spectacle.

"Instead, through the two-party system as an agent of democracy, the majority can govern the Philippines, and the minority can provide a hard-hitting but loyal opposition.

"I feel also that the time has come when less attention should be directed to the game of politics and more attention should be concentrated on farming and business. The youth should be weaned away from academic studies to technological and other practical pursuits. The politicians themselves should also show more regard for the elemental virtues of consistency and integrity.

"Withal, it is my opinion that the Philippine electoral system, in practice, has worked better than fairly well."

EDITORIAL

Differing visions for East Asia

Asahi Shimbun, Tokyo

At the second East Asia Summit, held Monday in the Philippine island of Cebu, leaders of the 16 Asia and Pacific countries agreed to start a joint study for economic integration within the region. The agreement appears to be a step toward creating the East Asia Community, a vision that has been championed by Japan.

The series of meetings in the Philippines highlighted the fact that Japan and China have two different visions for the East Asia Community, with Beijing currently enjoying a slight edge over Tokyo in their competition to lead the regional debate on this ambitious enterprise. Instead of focusing on short-term gains and setbacks in their diplomatic campaigns, Japan and China should try harder to offer better ideas for achieving the ultimate goal.

What is troubling, though, is the fact that Japan is still struggling to ride the wave of free trade agreements sweeping through the region. While China is expediting its negotiations with ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) to strike a free trade deal by 2010, Japan keeps disappointing the ASEAN members in trade talks by showing continued reluctance to open its farm market to imports.

If Japan keeps dragging its feet on this issue, thereby hampering overall efforts to accomplish the grand vision, it will eventually find itself left out of the initiative, rather than being at the forefront of the debate.

SAMU'T SARI

A kid holds a banner as he joins his parents who attended the Jan. 5 Dekada group assembly for the passage of a bill in the U.S. Congress that seeks to implement immigration reforms in the CNMI.

JACQUELINE HERNANDEZ

JACQUELINE HERNANDEZ

DEKADA RALLY
Filipino members of the Dekada group pose for a picture during Jan. 5's peaceful demonstration in front of Horiguchi Building in Garapan.

A Filipina shows off her banner as she and other Dekada members march toward Garapan during Jan. 5's demonstration calling for the passage of a bill in the U.S. Congress that would improve the immigration status of long-staying nonresident workers in the CNMI.

JACQUELINE HERNANDEZ

JACQUELINE HERNANDEZ

Members of the Dekada group express their solidarity during the rally in front of Horiguchi Building in Garapan on Jan. 5.

JACQUELINE HERNANDEZ

Filipino members of the Dekada group march toward Garapan to show their support for a bill that aims to gradually implement the federal minimum wage in the CNMI during a peaceful demonstration Jan. 5.

JACQUELINE HERNANDEZ

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

MOVER FOR MLK
Multi-Sectoral Overseas Filipino Workers Movement Inc. president Marites Aquino Castillo joins other MOVER officers and members during the first official CNMI-wide commemoration of the Martin Luther King Jr. Day holiday at the American Memorial Park amphitheater on Jan 15.

SINGING SENSATION
Angel Tumada, center, who was the first runner up at the recent search for Saipan Singing Superstar, poses with her mother, second from right, her aunt and brother, at Trends Beauty Parlor in San Jose. Also in the photo is Sunshine who served as hair and makeup artist for Angel.

EL SHADDAI CONCERT
El Shaddai International Catholic Charismatic Community Saipan and Tinian Chapter members, from left, Danny Bigalbal, Rowena Velasco and Arturo Macaspac display the "Experience the New Year 2007, A Cheer to New Life," poster for the group's one-night concert today, Jan. 13, at the Pedro L. Tenorio Multi-Purpose Center.

JACQUELINE HERNANDEZ

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

HONOR STUDENT
Marc Christian Artango de la Torre, a second grade student of San Vicente Elementary School, shows his two A honor roll certificates awarded by school principal James Rayphand and teacher Shirley Duenas. Marc received the awards for achieving the high standard in academic subjects during the first and second quarters.

Maharlika
PINOY LIFE IN THE MARIANAS

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